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COMMUNISM

AT THE END OF THE BREZHNEV ERA

THE SOVIET UNION of today serves as an example of what Communism does to all countries and to all peoples that fall under its control. The differences from country to country are of secondary importance; the dominant features of the process are everywhere alike.

The first act of the Communists upon coming to power in Russia in 1917 was to hand Germany 25, 30, 40 per cent of Russia's territory, whatever it took to buy Germany off, just so long as the Communists could retain control over the rest. (This supreme Communist principle—to cling to power at any cost, even if it spells ruin to one's country, one's people, and to neighboring peoples—manifests itself with steely consistency from Lenin to Brezhnev; here too Stalin was merely Lenin brought to a logical conclusion.) Immediately thereafter the Communists launched a civil war on the home front in order to destroy not only their military enemies, but every opponent in every stratum of non-combatants, shooting entire villages, laying waste whole districts, and depopulating towns and provinces. Through the fault of the Communists, who appropriated even seed grain from the peasants, the famine of 1921 affected thirty million people; five million peasants died in the Volga River basin. Since then massive famines have been all too common in our land. Nineteen thirty-three brought death from hunger to another five or six million people; during the war of 1941-45 peasants resorted to eating grass-meal patties. While people were dying in the postwar famine of 1946-47, the government was exporting grain. From 1917 on, the population has never known satiety, security, or personal freedom.

It is therefore hardly surprising that in the early phases of World War II some three million soldiers surrendered to the enemy, that the people of the occupied regions awaited liberation by the invading troops, and that even in the months when the Germans' defeat had become obvious, several hundred thousand Soviet citizens from outside the country alone volunteered for the Liberation Army against Stalin. However, Hitler was waging war not against the ideological plague of Communism but to seize territory and to subjugate the peoples of the USSR. He thus forced the people, as they defended themselves, to defend and preserve Communism.

During the civil war of 1918-20, and with even greater intensity after its conclusion, the Communists, seeking to have no other contenders for power within the country, set about liquidating all other political parties, as well as all neutral cultural, religious, ethnic, and economic organizations. They

instituted relentless mass exterminations of all who could provide even the slightest opposition to the Communist regime. Entire social strata were destroyed en masse—the nobility, the officers, the clergy, the merchants—as well as individuals who happened to stand out from the crowd or who manifested independent thinking. At first the heaviest blows fell on the largest national group, the ethnic Russians, and on their Orthodox religion; subsequent blows were just as methodically aimed at the other nationalities. By the end of the allegedly peaceful 1920s, these policies had claimed several million victims. Immediately thereafter came the annihilation of some 12 to 15 million of the most diligent peasants. The history of these successive decimations has been set forth, to the best of my ability, in *The Gulag Archipelago*.

What was the point of destroying the best, the hardest-working part of the peasantry? We would understand nothing about Communism if we tried to comprehend it on the principles of normal human reason. The driving force of Communism, as it was devised by Marx, is political power, power at any cost and without regard to human losses or a people's physical deterioration. For the Communist regime, the important thing was to have no vigorous, economically independent rivals in the country; the peasantry—80 per cent of the population at the time—had to be crippled so that it could not oppose the regime. With this goal in mind, the economically ruinous collective farm system becomes politically advantageous.

The agricultural economy in a Communist country is not designed according to calculations for achieving an optimum harvest, but is determined "ideologically." It is controlled by a grotesquely bureaucratic central plan incapable of anticipating real-life circumstances or of giving thought to the future, striving only to plunder the earth, as if this same earth will not have to sustain us tomorrow. For decades on end, the regime has handed down absurd and ruinous prescriptions that the people have had no choice but to

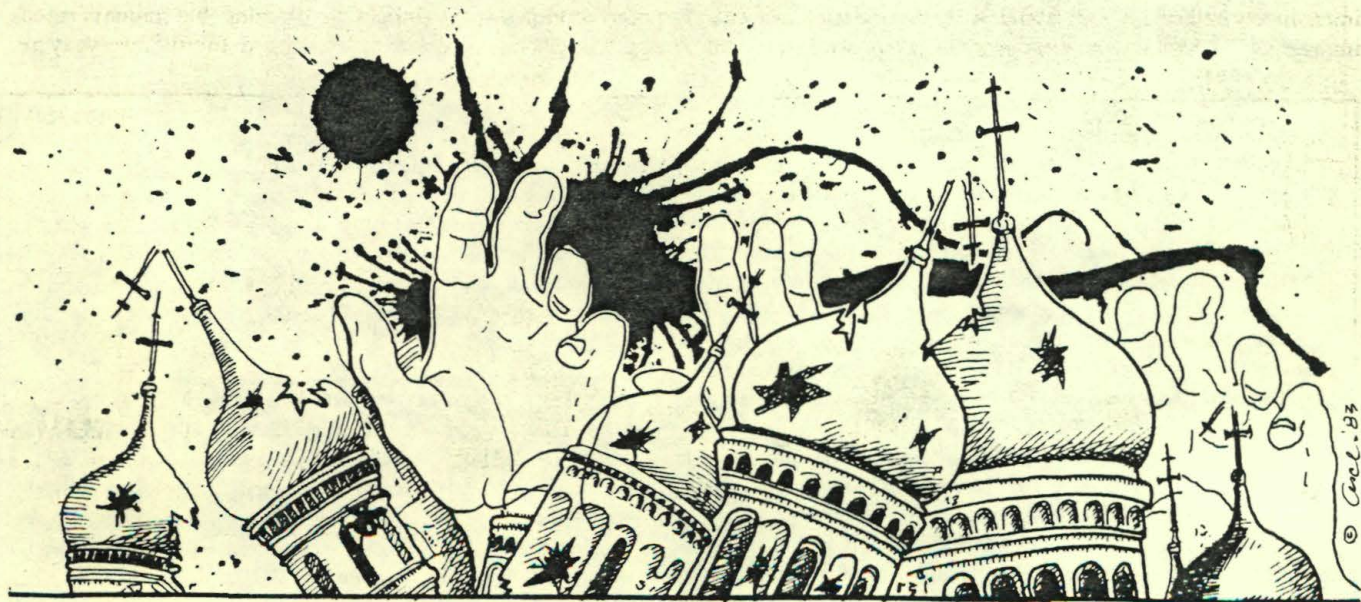
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follow. The peasant is no longer devoted to the land and to his work as he was for centuries. What an achievement! Peasants have been numbed into indifference, obediently carrying out stupid orders, sowing and harvesting at the wrong times, irreparably turning the best meadowlands into unproductive plowed fields, cutting down forests until the rivers dry up, or draining good lakes to satisfy the formal requirements of "land reclamation." (But as they reclaim land in one spot, the same amount of acreage is abandoned elsewhere for lack of manpower.) Harvested grain and vegetables rot because of poor storage and inadequate transportation. Farm machinery rusts in the open air in winter and is soon out of commission. When there is too little time to spread all the fertilizer required by "the plan," the unused portion is burned so as to leave no trace of the infraction. Or consider this picture: a combine driver sells seed grain on the side at cut rates instead of sowing it. No one will check to see how much he has sown, and he doesn't care what comes up. For two months every year, teenagers from city high schools and other city dwellers inexperienced in agriculture are shipped in to "help" on the dying fields: their time, quite uselessly spent, is paid for by the regular salary they continue to receive at the various institutions from which they are absent. During the past ten years imports of foodstuffs to the USSR have increased forty-fold, and there have been four poor harvests in a row—such is the worth of this system of agriculture. For decades, the state has paid artificially low, indeed contemptible, prices for the produce of collective farms, so that the labor of the farmer has in effect been appropriated without any recompense whatever. For the person weeding a field all day long, the rewards have been only the tough weeds themselves—food for his cow or goat. Having arrogated the collective farmer's full working day at no cost to itself, the state permitted him to earn a livelihood by working his tiny private plot—about three-fifths of an acre—during what was left of the day and evening. These plots consume the remaining strength of old men and women (retired collective farmers until recently drew no old-age pension; they now receive a miserly sum), of invalids, and of children. (Fifteen million rural children don't know what it means to play; rural teenagers are smaller and more disease-prone than their urban counterparts.) In terms

of area, the private plots make up only 2 per cent of the land under cultivation in the country, yet they generate one-third of the total production of vegetables, eggs, milk, and meat. But since up to a third of the collective farms' production of these same items is lost because of spoilage, the peasants—doubly exploited, deprived of fertilizers and modern technology, and working only with their hands, as they did long ago—produce on their private plots almost *half* of the USSR's supplies of those foodstuffs. But they cannot even sell all of this freely on the market. They have to give up a part to the state—formerly as a "tax," today in the form of "voluntary" sales at cut prices.

The disproportions of the Communist agricultural system speak for themselves: the entire adult rural population spends its days working on 98 per cent of the cultivated area, while the remaining 2 per cent is worked by invalids and children, and by adults in the evenings. But even this last refuge is being eliminated by the regime in its ideological madness: more and more collective farms (*kolkhozy*) have in recent years been reorganized into state farms (*sovkhozy*), a process that transforms the farmer into an industrial worker deprived of his private plot; these plots will therefore soon disappear altogether. Entire villages are being razed, the remnants of the peasant way of life eradicated, and the people resettled into multi-storied structures where cattle and fowl can no longer be kept. Once again the Soviet regime is demolishing its own base of production while "triumphing" ideologically.

The same type of absurdity besets the entire economy. By assuming complete control of production, the state has wrecked it. For sixty years official speeches, newspapers, and the radio have trumpeted the successes of Soviet industry; in fact it is an ailing organism, plagued by numerous afflictions that are temporarily relieved only by illegal "microcapitalistic" means (administered in circumvention of socialist remedies). The essential goal of the Soviet economy is not economic growth, not a general increase in production, not even a rise in productivity or profit, but the functioning of a mighty military machine and the abundant provisioning of the ruling caste. The party bureaucracy is unable to organize either production or commercial distribution; it knows only how to confiscate goods that have al-



ready been produced. It is a system that cannot tolerate independence. Incapable of effective economic management, the regime substitutes coercion for leadership. The economy is fettered and hemmed in by a multitude of administrative restrictions, the aim of which is to prevent the emergence of any free social force. An obtuse extension of these rules has a deadening impact on many fruitful scientific undertakings; to offset this, key technology is either purchased or stolen in the West, and productivity rises only as a result of technical advances that have come into common use the world over. The result is foreign debts in the fantastic billions and depletion of the mineral and fuel resources that are used as payment. During their years in power, the Soviet leaders have sold or squandered reserves sufficient for their own generation and the two following generations. A great power, yet one that must import everything from electronics to grain, and that exports only its natural riches and arms, the Soviet Union has a standard of living below that of more than thirty other nations. Meanwhile, 12 per cent of the state's income is derived from the sale of exorbitantly priced vodka (which brings the populace to the point of induced idiocy) and of inferior wines prepared in unsanitary conditions: the government is literally driving the people to drink in order to finance its global designs.

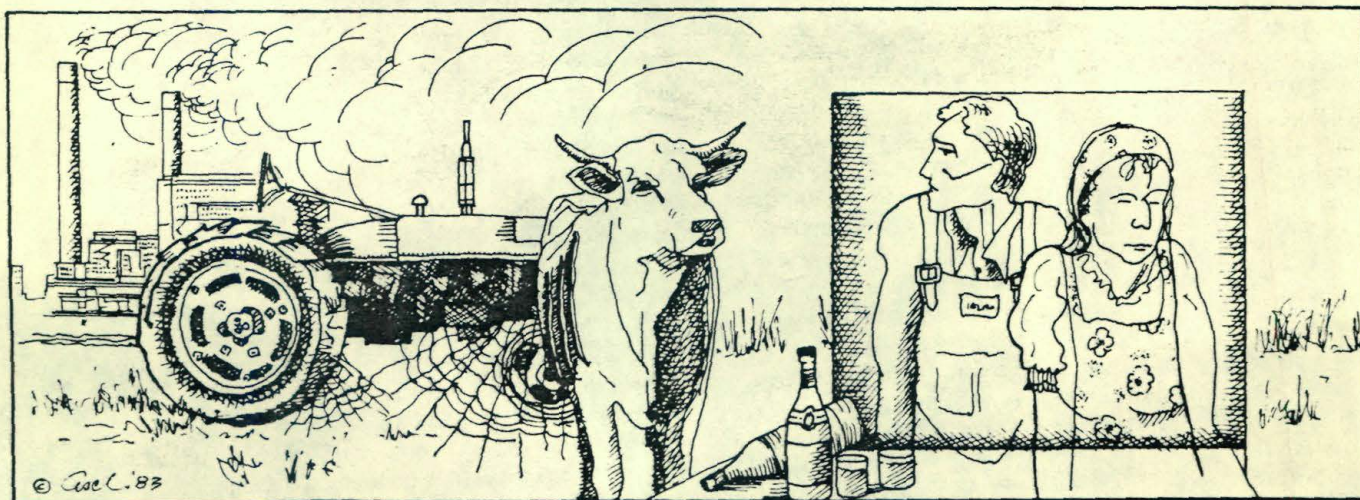
The central plan controlling the economy does not take into account local circumstances or concrete events, yet it must be followed in rigid detail. The result is absurdity and chaos. Local officials work full-time devising ways of resisting or circumventing the plan, risking criminal charges at every step. Construction, for example, could not proceed if the laws were adhered to strictly: neither materials nor manpower would be available. Only illicit methods work. Everyone trembles at the threat of prosecution, yet nothing whatever would get built in any other way. The restrictions hinder action to the point that industrial managers are afraid to introduce obviously advantageous new technology: that would affect the plan and disrupt the schedule; it is far less trouble to announce that it will be instituted during the next five-year plan. Bold men with initiative have here and there attempted to set up the finances at their factories so as to get around petty state regulations and to be able to pay according to the quality and quantity of work performed. The results have always been spectacular, but such managers are immediately reined in from above with new restrictions, cuts in budget allocations, and sometimes even with criminal

proceedings. The emergence of free economic forces is seen as a threat to the bureaucracy's control of events.

The plan is not based on the quality of goods, nor on their variety, but on their gross value; thus whoever produces the greatest number of expensive, unnecessary, and unsalable items is "ahead" and is awarded a prize. To satisfy the plan, more timber is cut and floated downstream yearly than can later be hauled away; the rest rots. The plan means that Siberia, the richest part of the country in energy resources, has a shortage of electric power. An outstanding black-earth region is pointlessly chosen as the site of the huge Kama industrial complex. The Baikal-Amur railway line is a high-priority "national construction project"; no resources, materials, or manpower are spared. Yet the line is exceedingly poor in quality, with settling of the roadbed and derailments, even though the cost of five million rubles per kilometer surpasses the cost of an equivalent unit of railway construction in pre-revolutionary Siberia by a factor of twenty (taking into account the changed value of the ruble).

To thousands of such examples one must add one other aspect of Communism: the mandatory system of lies. From the day the Communist system was born, one of its primary aims has been to conceal or distort what actually takes place. The effort was successful from the start, and has remained so throughout the zigs and zags of the subsequent decades, with the rest of the world actually wanting to be deceived, wishing to believe in the goodness of socialism. This led, at the launching of Stalin's first five-year plan in 1928, to the proclamation of unattainable goals for the sake of foreign prestige, goals made even less feasible by a propaganda campaign demanding "The five-year plan in four years!" Yet fulfillment of the stated objectives was required under threat of sanctions, and every level of management was left with no choice but to submit false reports, inflated figures, and claims to have accomplished what had not in fact been done at all. These inflated figures then became the basis of new plans, also unattainable, which led to new lies. By now there is half a century's worth of accumulated falsehoods. The USSR does not publish false statistics only for foreign consumption: the leaders themselves do not know the true situation in their own country.

It goes without saying that this lunatic conduct of economic policy, which anticipates nothing but military needs and exhibits a contemptuous disregard for the everyday re-



quirements of the populace, leads to irreparable abuse of the environment. It is the plan at any cost, no matter what may be ruined in the process, particularly if this is merely some historical site or an unsullied natural region. Numerous hydroelectric stations are being constructed across rivers in flat country, flooding cultivated fields, grasslands, and populated districts; the hastily constructed dams ruin fishing. The price of all this is far greater than the benefits in increased electric energy. Beneath the waters of such new "seas," about which, incredibly, the Communists like to boast, there now lie a dozen towns, many hundreds of villages, and valuable forests. In contrast, the highly prized Sea of Azov, which used to provide more fish than the Black, Caspian, and Baltic Seas put together, has had its water level lowered by the Volga-Don Canal and has been turned into a dump for industrial wastes. The fish population has decreased ninety- to a hundred-fold compared to pre-World War II levels.

Having ruined the European part of Russia, they are now wreaking destruction beyond the Urals. Lake Baikal, a unique formation which has withstood geological calamities for 25 million years and which used to contain the world's cleanest water, has been forever poisoned by the dumping of heavy metals and by the effluents of a cellulose

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factory that produces tires for long-range bombers. The hydroelectric power station near Alma-Ata has caused half of Lake Balkhash to dry up. The attempt to cultivate the virgin lands of Kazakhstan has turned seven and a half million acres of land into desert. The Siberian forests are being cut down rapaciously, without any effort at reforestation. Inferior timbering techniques inflict permanent damage on the soil and kill off new forest growths. Incompetent construction of the Baikal-Amur railroad has doomed a wide strip of land along the roadbed, with the surface layer turning into a barren swamp; uncontrolled removal of gravel is spoiling rivers. Another huge area is now being laid waste by the frenzied construction of the natural-gas pipeline between Taimyr and Western Europe. (All of Europe, and even Japan, is helping in this project, which will certainly make use of slave labor from the camps.)

The Communist authorities are recklessly willing to pay this price in order to keep seizing new countries in Africa and Asia, countries they will ravage in the same way—just as they are plundering the oceans of the world. Half a century ago they sacrificed the peasantry to the insane concept of the collective farm—are they surprised today that the harvests are poor? In the same way they are now seeking to improve the climate: rivers flowing into the Arctic Ocean will

be reversed and made to flow south—another insane project that will produce a new disaster in a few years, a disaster not limited in its impact to the Russian north alone, but with repercussions for the entire planet as the balance of the Arctic Ocean is upset. In the case of every enterprise, the plan is such that it is too time-consuming and too expensive to safeguard nature and to construct installations for purifying wastes. And so the environment deteriorates. The areas surrounding cities and industrial installations are disfigured and covered with litter; rivers are poisoned with concentrations of toxic materials that exceed the "upper permissible limit" for these substances by a factor of two or three. In the case of urban air pollution the factor is ten and in some cases even a hundred. (None of this is reported openly, since the destruction of nature and the threat to human life are classified matters in the USSR, just like everything else; those who have tried to air these issues publicly have ended up in psychiatric wards.) Lung cancer has increased twofold in our country over the last ten years. We are dying together with our natural environment.

Children with living parents grow up like orphans: because the father's salary is invariably insufficient and the mother must work, millions of children begin their lives in overcrowded day-care centers, in unhealthy and tension-filled surroundings, with inadequate supervision but with the compensation of an "ideological upbringing." Millions of them will pass their entire subsequent existence in common living quarters of this type, in trade schools and factories, with the facilities everywhere rundown and unsanitary; an early exposure to drunkenness and depravity is the norm here. Nor can a young person escape to a private apartment: he or she would be unable to get the necessary residence permit. These people are like serfs, totally dependent on their factory managers, who exploit them without limit: should they lose their job, they also lose the right to remain in that city. This state of affairs applies throughout the Soviet Union: the employer has full administrative power over his employees, and everyone everywhere, with the partial exception of Moscow, is fully and directly dependent upon his administrative supervisor. The employee cannot present any demands and cannot leave of his own volition. Salaries are calamitously low; for a workman, they do not correspond even to a tenth of the real value of his labor. Cramped, poor-quality housing is the rule, with several unrelated families sharing a single apartment. Even decades-long employment in a single enterprise does not earn one the right to separate family quarters.

The so-called free medical care is of wretched quality, and the hospitals are squalid. The country is afflicted with mass alcoholism, and young men have a high death rate from alcohol-related accidents. The drinking problem among women is also on the rise.

Except in Moscow and Leningrad, commercial goods are of poor quality, and one must stand in long lines to get them. All sorts of items suddenly disappear from the market—soap, detergent, thread, needles, dishes, underwear, light bulbs. For 65 years the population has not received adequate nutrition or the requisite number of calories. In the provincial towns there is real hunger: no meat, fish, eggs, or milk, not even macaroni or groats are to be found. (No one has laid eyes on rice for half a century.) Many cities in recent years have instituted food rationing, and this in the absence of war or natural disaster. Nowhere else in

the world do so many women work at such physically arduous tasks without mechanical aids. Aside from their jobs, Soviet women also spend more than thirty hours per week on domestic chores and standing in line. (The state actually prefers that people should be preoccupied with trying to obtain their daily bread, so that no thoughts will be left for anything else.)

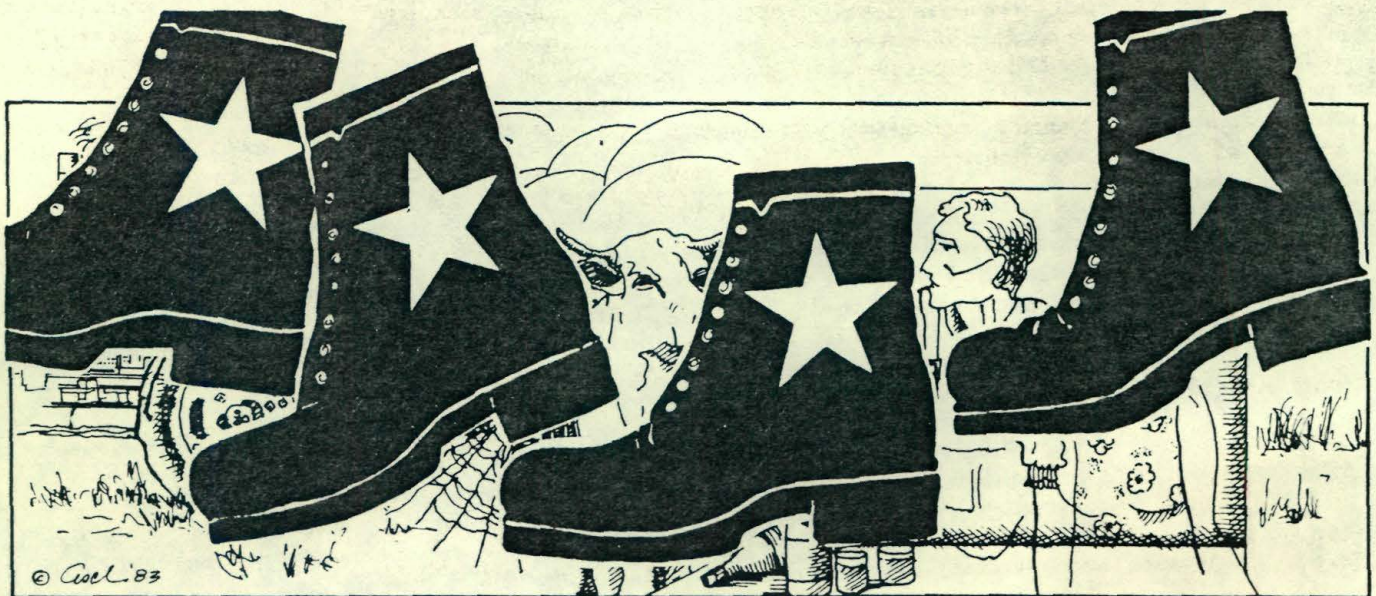
The government robs the land and the people of hundreds of billions of rubles, and the oppressed populace has only one real means of resistance: it steals, in turn, its daily bread from the government. From ancient times theft was looked upon as a deadly sin in Russia, but today stealing from the government has become a common, universally understood fact of life, an act necessary for survival. Through theft the people recover part of their rights, and this form of self-defense causes tremendous harm to the government. Many items—wire, nails, machine oil, paint, fertilizer—simply cannot be purchased honestly anywhere in the country, but they can be stolen at one's place of employment and then sold on the black market. Materials, instruments, and foodstuffs worth billions of rubles are plundered on every industrial site and every collective farm, injecting more chaos into the production process. Children of collective farmers learn to steal at an early age. No one has any desire to work honestly for the benefit of a dishonest regime. No one is paid a fair wage, but neither does anyone exert himself to the fullest. This is true of the workman at the lathe, of the government official, and even of the scientist in his research institute: each and every one of them strives to rest during working hours in order to save his strength for evening "moonlighting" or other business. People work at an ever decreasing level of their capacity, and in important projects the management stimulates participation by engaging in its own form of deceiving the state: creating fictional but paying job-titles, or providing opportunities for illicit additional earnings.

The harshness of life, the constant feeling of hunger, cramped living quarters, and lack of time all combine to deprive women of the strength to raise children, which leads to a large number of abortions. Among the Slavic peoples in the USSR, there are four abortions for every live birth. Frequent abortions cause infertility and miscarriages—the

number of the latter has been growing at 6 to 7 per cent yearly. Poor nourishment of mothers-to-be, alcoholism among women, inferior medical care, and polluted air in the cities have contributed to a rising rate of infant mortality; children who do survive are sickly, and suffer increasingly from genetic defects. The USSR today has a falling birth rate, a rising mortality rate, and a decreasing life expectancy. Calculations made before 1917, based on the birth rate of that time, projected a population of 400 million by 1985; the population today is 266 million. We are witnessing a period of irreversible population decline among the Slavic peoples in the USSR. Given the rising infertility among women in their child-bearing years and the factor of genetic inertia, the demographic slide of the Russians probably could not be arrested in the next hundred years even by beneficial political and social changes.

Above a crushed populace looms the tyrannical apparatus of the party and state, which, with its attendant machinery for propaganda and repression, numbers three million persons. This is a caste supplied in abundance with every privilege—special stores (where the highest-quality goods are sold at low prices), secret payments of money untouched by taxes, the best houses and apartments, special medical facilities, free access to health resorts, a power over the population that has virtually no legal restraints—but a caste that pays for these benefits with unquestioning and obsequious service. A member of this caste must ignore the suffering of his own people, present, past, and future: he maintains his position only so long as he is faithful to the system; he is expelled at the slightest hint of disloyalty. At the center of this group is an oligarchy of party functionaries, about a hundred thousand strong, whose desires need have no limit whatever (the ruling class of Old Russia did not live as well) and whose children have access to the same privileges, so that the oligarchy becomes hereditary.

The Soviet leaders have more than satisfied their personal needs in terms of power, veneration, and property; why, then, should they strive to overrun the world? Yet that is precisely what the Communist madness leads them to do, for they too are prisoners of an ideological system. Unrestricted finances, military might, international politics—all this is in their hands, but the West hopes in vain that the



replacement of one leader by another will bring about a mellowing of the system. The Communist government has already lasted an excessively long time in terms of an individual life span; it has sucked the life out of its subject peoples and has corrupted and deadened the spirit by compulsory lies. The all-permeating lie is the most burdensome trait of the regime. For more than half a century, millions of people have been forced to take part in the elaborate shams of "socialist competition" and "Communist *subbotniki*" (i.e., work without pay on one's day off), in humiliating meetings, and in the crude inculcation of lies that occurs at compulsory political sessions after work. As in the early years of Communist rule, popular disturbances are crushed

Under Communism a country is never prepared for a long and healthy economic existence. But it is always ready to strike, to seize, and to expand militarily

quickly and with great brutality (e.g., the uprisings in Novocherkassk, Aleksandrov, Murom, Krasnodar; the mutiny on a Baltic destroyer; the strikes in Perm and in several cities on the Volga). The masses are overcome by despondency and indifference: the impotence you feel when you watch your country being destroyed and defiled for two-thirds of a century. At times the suppressed frustration breaks through in the form of attacks on official Soviet monuments.

Religion and national consciousness are persecuted with particular relentlessness, as the regime's main enemies. Religious education of children is sternly proscribed. Each religion feels the pressure of the throttling noose. In the Baltic states Catholic priests are treacherously killed. Children are taken away from Baptists and Pentecostals and the parents thrown in prison. Harsh prison terms are handed out to Orthodox Christians: e.g., Father Gleb Yakunin; members of the seminary of Ogorodnikov and Poreshe; and Krakhmalnikova, the publisher of *samizdat* anthologies of Christian readings. But the most crushing (and repeated) prison terms are reserved for those who express the aspirations of any national group under Soviet rule. Simple charity accorded to the families of prisoners by the Russian Social Fund (an organization funded by royalties from the sale of *The Gulag Archipelago* and augmented by collections within the USSR) is punished by arrest and imprisonment.

In its inhumanity, Communism has no historical precedent; before the twentieth century no country experienced anything like it, but today more than twenty lands are oppressed by it. Many times it seemed ready to collapse here or there, but it has always managed to keep its balance, while its powerful enemies, on the contrary, have been destroyed. Communism is a trap from which no nation has ever escaped. No personal tyranny can compare with ideological Communism, since every personal tyrant attains a

limit of power that satisfies him. But no single country is enough to satisfy a totalitarian Communist regime. Communism is a type of virtually incomprehensible regime that is not interested in the flourishing of a country, or in the health and welfare of its people. On the contrary, Communism sacrifices both people and country to achieve its external goals.

The main goal of Communism is an irrational and fanatical urge to swallow the maximum amount of external territory and population, with the ideal limit being the entire planet. Under Communism a country is never prepared for a long and healthy economic existence. But it is always ready to strike, to seize, and to expand militarily—that is an indispensable mode of Communist existence. Thus Communist China (which is no longer the true historical China), despite its military weakness, has given organizational and material assistance to murderers—the Khmer Rouge—and has tried to ignite revolution in Indonesia. North Korea invaded the South and has been frustrated in its murderous designs only by the presence of American troops. And Vietnam, bled white in its recent victorious struggle with America, has already plunged into Cambodia; Cuba is invading Latin America and Africa; Ethiopia makes war on Eritrea; South Yemen attacks North Yemen; Angola is involved in Namibia. And it is symptomatic that Communist imperialism (in contrast to the earlier colonial variety) does not even benefit or enrich the nation that it impels to commit aggression; in fact, this is the nation it ruins first.

It is a dangerous illusion to draw distinctions between "better" and "worse" Communisms, between more peace-loving and more aggressive kinds. They are all inimical to humanity, and if one seems restrained in its behavior, this is merely because it has not yet gained military strength. If we know next to nothing about the forced-labor camps in China, North Korea, or Vietnam, this means only that people are held there in even harsher conditions than in Soviet camps: no individual and no information has been allowed to slip out. But we do know that in Addis Ababa the bodies of executed schoolboys are stacked up in rows. And priests are shot in both Albania and Angola. In all Communist states the form of property ownership is not rational or practical but "ideological." Marxism is hostile to the physical existence and the spiritual essence of every nation. It is futile to hope that a compromise with Communism will be found, or that relations will be improved by concessions and trade.

Communism is the denial of life; it is a fatal disease of a nation and the death of all humanity. And there is no nation on earth that has immunity against Communism.

There has been a great deal of excitement in the West in connection with the change of leadership in the Soviet Union, and, naturally, there are great hopes. And just as naturally, a few small but seemingly meaningful steps taken by the new leadership, particularly in the area of intellectual freedom and emigration, would be enough to "signal" that everything is improving. A survey of Soviet reality shows, however, that neither a change of leadership nor dozens of symbolic gestures could improve the situation. This can only be achieved if the life of the nation is restored to health in a fundamental way.

To improve or to correct Communism is not feasible. Communism can only be done away with—by the joint efforts of the many peoples oppressed by it. □